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ABSTRACT

This study examined the status of the interim presidency at public research/doctorate-granting universities. A questionnaire soliciting demographic data on interim presidential utilization was sent to the institutional research offices at 134 universities, and the returned questionnaires, 20 interim presidents were selected to participate in phenomenological interviews. Data from the questionnaires revealed that interim presidencies are prevalent among public research/doctorate-granting institutions and that interim presidents are being employed with increasing frequency. Institutions can anticipate having an interim presidential administration every 7.5 years. Interviews with the 20 interim presidents concluded that: (1) periods of transitional leadership do not have inherently negative effects on universities; (2) interim presidency is personally and professionally rewarding; (3) interim presidencies have wide ranging effects on individuals and their careers; (4) constituents, particularly appointing authorities, are supportive of interim administrations; (5) interim presidents, through their actions and leadership, shape constituents' impressions of the interim period and set the stage for later accomplishments; and (6) interim presidents often act as one of three types -- "back-up players," "utility players," or "pinch hitters." (Contains 31 references.) (Author/JB)

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Presidential Change: Interim Administrations in Higher Education

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Abstract

This study examined the status of the interim presidency at public research/doctorate-granting institutions. A questionnaire soliciting demographic data on interim presidential utilization was sent to the institutional research offices at 134 universities and, from the returned questionnaires, twenty former interim presidents were selected to participate in phenomenological interviews. Data from the questionnaires revealed that interim presidencies are prevalent among public research/doctorate-granting institutions and that interim presidents are being employed with increasing frequency. Institutions can anticipate having an interim presidential administration every seven and one-half years. Interim presidents concluded that periods of transitional leadership do not have inherently negative effects on universities.

AIR

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Jean Endo
Editor
Forum Publications

Institutions do not quietly settle into states of inertia between presidencies. Incidents and issues requiring leadership and decisive action occur whether or not a permanent president is in place. Interim presidents are increasingly being asked to assume the governance of institutions during these periods of presidential transition. However, little has been written or is known about interim presidential administrations. This paper, based on research conducted at public research institutions, provides an overview of the interim presidential phenomenon. The interim presidency is examined from the perspectives of demography, the perceptions of interim presidents of their relationships to institutional functioning and presidential succession, and the essence of the experience at a personal level for those who have been interim presidents.

THE STATUS OF THE INTERIM PRESIDENCY

Statistics on presidential tenure and the stated tenure expectations of existing presidents portend an increased demand for transitional leadership. Presidents enter their posts anticipating staying ten years or less (Alton, 1971, 1982; Cohen & March, 1986). This planned obsolescence has been reflected, in part, in the declining tenures of this century: average presidential tenure decreased from about 10.9 years in 1899, to 7.7 years in 1939, to around 4.5 years in the early 1970s (Hodgkinson, 1971, p. 270; Kerr, 1970, p. 139). Estimates from the last two decades indicate that presidential tenure has stabilized somewhat and is now between 6 and 7 years (Gade, 1986; Ross, Green & Henderson, 1993). The corresponding annual presidential turnover rates range from a low of 8.3% for private research universities to a high of 16.1% for public research universities (Kerr & Gade, 1989, p. 170). Kerr and Gade (1989) estimate that institutions between the years of 1980 and 2000, will "average about one- and one-half presidents per decade" (p. 21).

At approximately two-thirds of the three to five hundred colleges and universities that experience presidential turnover each year, the presidents depart before their successors are named or are able to assume office (Kauffman, 1980, p. 13; Nason, 1979, p. 19, 1984, p. viii). Cohen and March (1986) project that on January 1 of any given year approximately 6% of all large institutions will be headed by interim administrations (pp. 165-66). Figures for 1990 for the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges (NASULGC) substantiate

this proportion (W. E. Davis, personal communication, January 22, 1991).

The standard presidential search takes from 6 to 12 months, with searches of 15 to 18 months not uncommon. When the former president is absent from the institution, this phase of leadership succession assumes a new and critical dimension (Nason, 1984). The act of appointing an interim president and the choice of the individual for the post and their consequent performance, set the stage for the upcoming search and functioning of the institution. Faculty may interpret the interim president selection as an indication of the direction the trustees have for the college. The interim appointment can influence who will become and remain as candidates for the permanent presidency and, in turn, will color how the institution is perceived by others. Kauffman (1974) and Libby (1983) recommend that institutions, as part of their presidential transition management, establish procedures for selecting interim presidents.

The transitional period between presidencies has been viewed paradoxically in the literature. Critics have labeled it a time of "operational discontinuity" and instability (Walker, 1982, p. 3), and as an opportunity for reappraising institutional priorities and direction. The interim president is portrayed as an administrator who reigns over chaos and as someone who is a caretaker or lame duck (Dodds, 1962). Conversely, the interim president is said to be a leader who "contributes to the ongoing momentum of the institution" (DeZonia, 1979, p. 33) and smooths turbulent waters (Barringer, 1980).

The actual effects of interim presidencies on colleges and universities have not been documented. Relevant findings from the research on presidential succession and institutional functioning in higher education have been ambiguous and inconclusive as well. Birnbaum (1989), surveying the succession literature, reports that no consensus has been reached on the effect of administrative succession on organizational performance. From his study on the relationship between changes in presidential leadership and faculty perceptions of institutional functioning, Birnbaum concluded that no changes could be confidently attributed to the change in presidential leadership. The number of presidents an institution had over a ten year period did not figure significantly into faculty members' perceptions of university functioning.

Appointing authorities may look within or outside institutions when seeking interim presidents. The advantages attributed to inside candidates are their knowledge of their institutions and familiarity with their campus communities. Insider disadvantages include the displacement of senior administrators, constituents' perceptions of interim presidents' status and objectivity, and the dilemma presented by the possible presidential candidacy of interim presidents (Evans & Fletcher, 1980). Interim presidents brought in from outside institutions are seen as preventing disruption to the administrative hierarchy and as being freer to help with the presidential search. Their liability is their lack of institutional orientation.

Retired presidents and administrators, and incumbent senior administrators—particulary those nearing retirement—are mentioned as the most likely interim presidential prospects. The perceived role of the interim president, his/her anticipated time in office, and the institutional situation, influence the selection (Gilmore, 1988).

Appointing authorities are admonished to give serious consideration to policies regarding interim candidacy. This issue merits strict attention because of its implications for institutional image, the recruitment of other external and internal candidates, individuals' careers, and post-interim relationships.

The role of the interim president, as put forth in the literature, is tripartite. The interim president is to help with the presidential search and selection process, provide for the ongoing management and momentum of the institution, and prepare the way for the new president. The emphasis placed on each of these aspects may be dependent on the reasons for the former president's departure and the state of the institution (Gilmore, 1988). Interim presidents are encouraged to act decisively and to address sensitive issues which might have a negative effect on the incoming chief executive. With an effective interim leader in place, appointing authorities can go about the business of selecting a new president.

Despite the apparent importance of interim presidents and their administrations, almost no empirical research has been done on interim presidents. Statistical information regarding their employment and tenure have been obtained only indirectly from research on permanent presidents. The extant body of literature pertaining specifically to interim presidents is largely

composed of commentaries by those who have themselves served in the interim capacity. Questions regarding the duration and frequency of interim presidential tenures; interim presidential relationships, tasks, and roles; the institutional effects of interim presidencies, and the personal effects of interim presidencies on interim presidents, have largely been left unanswered. This study approached the interim presidency systematically and provides a more complete understanding of interim presidencies and their implications.

METHODOLOGY

The 134 institutions categorized as public Research Universities I, Research Universities II, Doctorate-Granting Universities I, and Doctorate-Granting Universities II in the 1987 edition of the Carnegie Foundation's *A Classification of Institutions of Higher Education*, were selected for study from the population of all higher education institutions. This group of institutions was chosen because its corresponding potential for interim president utilization was high based on presidential turnover rates (Gade, 1986; Cohen & March, 1986).

Questionnaires soliciting demographic data on all presidential and interim presidential administrations since 1900 were sent to the institutional research offices of the 134 universities. Institutions were asked to provide more detailed information for interim administrations occurring on or since January 1, 1980. (1980 was selected for in-depth reporting for reasons of feasibility and because presidential tenure stabilized around that time.)

Data from the questionnaires were used to compute these descriptive statistics: the number and percentage of institutions who have employed interim presidents in the past century, and those which, at the time of the survey, were headed by an interim president; the mean interim and presidential tenures and the range of interim and presidential tenures since 1980; the proportion of time institutions are presided over by interim presidents; and presidential turnover. Tenure was computed for those interim and permanent presidents who were either in office as of January 1, 1980, or took office in the ensuing years.

Mean interim tenure was calculated only on those interim presidents who had completed their terms because it was anticipated that the typical interim tenure would be less than two years, many of the reported interim presidents would have already finished their stints in office,

and that time in the position for those serving when the questionnaire was received would not differ markedly from those in the recent past.

Presidential tenure was figured in the same manner. Mean tenure was calculated for those presidents who had ended their service, and the current number of years in office for incumbents was tabulated.

The annual presidential turnover rate was computed consistent with the method used by TIAA-CREF (1978-79,1982-83,1984, 1988). (# of institutions with new presidents at end of base period ÷ number of institutions in sample=%. %÷# of years in base period=annual rate.) January 1, 1987-December 31, 1991 was established as the base period.

The questionnaires yielded the names of the former and current interim presidents; the present location and position, if known, for those interim presidents who had served on or since January 1, 1980 to the date the questionnaire was completed; whether the interim presidents had been selected from within or from outside the institution; and, from where and what position they came. Number and percentage were computed on the internal/external and position variables.

Further data supplied by the questionnaires included whether the position was titled "acting," "interim" or something else; whether the institution had a succession policy and, if so, what it was, and if not, the means for selecting the interim president; and whether the bylaws stated if the interim president could be a candidate for the permanent presidency and the answer to that question. Number and percentage were figured for all these variables.

From the returned questionnaires, twenty former interim presidents who had served on or since January 1, 1980 were chosen to participate in phenomenological interviews. This group of former interim presidents active on or since that date was targeted because members' experiences were the most recent, and less time, with its detrimental effects on memory, would have passed. Also, it was doubtful that the institutions would know the whereabouts of former interim presidents for an extended period if they were no longer on their campuses.

The interim presidents were selected for interviews on the bases of gender, location, position, and availability.[1] Four of the participants were females and sixteen were males.

Though there were twenty interviews conducted, the former interim presidents had amassed twenty-three interim presidencies among them (three of the participants were interim president twice). The backgrounds of the individuais—prior positions held and internal/external selection—were representative of the larger sample of interim presidents.

Interviews were conducted by telephone in November and December 1992 and January and February 1993 and followed a phenomenological format. Notes taken during the interviews and vitae from the participants were used for additional documentation and triangulation. The interview transcripts, notes, personal observations of this author, and vitae were analyzed following the guidelines for qualitative data analysis as prescribed by Miles and Huberman (1984).

RESULTS

The questionnaire was completed and returned by 86 (64%) of the institutions. All the questionnaires that were received were usable.

Interim Presidential Employment

A large proportion of the 86 universities responding to the questionnaire had employed interim presidents—80 (93%) had at least one interim president on or since January 1,1900. Only 6 (7%) had utilized no interim presidents. In excess of two-thirds of the institutions, 58 (67%), had employed an interim president on or since January 1, 1980: 39 (45%) had one interim president, 13 (15%) had two interim presidents, 5 (6%) had three interim presidents, and 1 (1%) had four interim presidents. See Table 1. At the time of the survey 6 (7%) of the institutions were headed by interim presidents.

Table 1

Institutions Employing Interim Presidents

On or Since January 1, 1980

No. of Interim Presidents Serving at an Institution	No. & % of Institutions
Zero	28 (33%)
One	39 (45%)
Two	13 (15%)
Three	5 (6%)
Four	1 (1%)
Totals	86 (100%)

A total of 320 interim presidents had served since 1900 with 236 (74%) coming prior to 1980 and 84 (26%) since 1980. January 1, 1980-July 31, 1992 accounts for just 14% of the time elapsed since January 1, 1900, but 26% of the interim presidents. Judging from these sums, the frequency with which institutions turn to interim presidents is increasing.

Tenure was computed on 51 interim presidents who had completed their service since 1980 and whose institutions had listed their tenure in months. The mean interim tenure for the 51 former interim presidents was 8.45 months with tenures ranging from 1 month to 24 months. Approximately 22 (43%) of the interim presidents served 6 months or less, 19 (37%) served from 7-12 months, and 10 (20%) served 13 months or longer. (At one institution the interim president agreed to a two-year tenure when he took the office.) Due to inaccurate reporting, tenure could not be computed on 27 interim presidents.

The mean presidential tenure for 76 presidents who had served since 1980, finished their terms in office, and whose institutions had reported specific dates of tenure, was 7 years 5 months. The presidents' tenures ranged from 8 months to 27 years 11 months. About 30

(39%) of the presidents served 5 years or less, 26 (34%) served 6-10 years, 15 (20%) served 11-15 years, and 5 (7%) served 16 or more years. For 50 former presidents whose institutions supplied unspecific information tenure was only estimated. Working with a mean interim presidential tenure of 8 months and a mean presidential tenure of 89 months, universities operate under an interim administration about 8% of the time.

Tenure was also calculated for 51 incumbent presidents. July 31, 1992 was used as the end of the calculation period. Mean incumbent tenure was found to be around 4 years 5 months with 33 (63%) of the incumbents having been in office 5 years or less.

Presidential turnover was figured for the period January 1, 1987 to December 31, 1991. Of the 86 responding institutions, 47 (55%) had a different president at the end of the period than did at the start, thus evidencing an 11% annual turnover rate. The current permanent president had announced his/her resignation at four of the responding institutions, with the amount of time between the date announced and the leaving date ranging from 4 to 17 months.

Interim Presidential Selection

Interim presidents were predominately chosen from within their own institutions with insiders accounting for 72 (91%) of the 79 interim presidents for whom this information was reported. Just 7 (9%) were selected from the outside. A majority—40 (56%)—of the inside interim presidents were called up from their positions as provosts or vice presidents for academic affairs. (Only 71 institutions provided this information.) Other vice-presidential level positions, such as Vice President for Research and Public Service or Vice President for Finance and Administration, accounted for 16 (23%) of the insider promotions, 8 (11%) of the internal interim presidents were deans—4 were law school deans. The remaining internal interim presidents came from these positions: 2 faculty members, 1 president emeritus, 1 vice provost for extension, 1 board of trustees member, 1 executive assistant to the president, and 1 retired

provost. See Table 2.

Table 2

Positions From Which Internal Interim Presidents Serving On or Since January 1, 1980 Were Selected

Position	No. & %
Provost or Vice President for Academic Affairs	40 (56%)
Other Vice Presidency	16 (23%)
Deanship	8 (11%)
Other	7 (10%)
Totals	71 (100%)

When choosing external interim presidents the institutions looked to a practicing attorney who was a former law school dean and trustee, two individuals in system-level positions within their systems, a vice president for academic affairs from a different university, and a president emeritus from another institution. In addition, one man who had been a president at an institution within a system acted as the interim president at two other institutions within the same system. Overall, the interim presidents, in their administrative experience, were quite similar to their presidential counterparts.

The interim presidency was a stepping stone to the permanent presidency at the institution where they were the interim president for 59 (25%) of the 236 interim presidents who were in office prior to 1980. Thus far since 1980, 17 (20%) of the 84 interim presidents listed have gone on to become the president at the institution where they held the interim presidency: 15 (88%) moved directly into the presidency from their interim job and 2 (12%) became president after intervening presidencies of one and five years. The promotion to president for 4 of these

interim presidents followed their second term as interim president.

Institutions were asked if they knew the whereabouts or current position of their former interim presidents who had served since 1980. Some did and some did not. From their responses it could be deduced that 9 interim presidents had captured a permanent presidency at another institution. It is possible that others, unknown to their former universities, had become presidents and that in the future, more of the former interim presidents will be chosen as presidents. What can be confidently stated is that a minimum of 26 (31%) of the former interim presidents since 1980 have achieved the rank of president.

Individuals may be interim presidents more than one time. Since 1900, 26 people were interim presidents two times and 3 people were interim presidents three times. Of these individuals holding multiple interim presidencies, 11 served at least one of their terms since 1980. It was inconclusive from the information provided by the institutions whether or not interim succession policies had anything to do with a person being an interim president more than once.

Out of the 320 interim presidents serving this century, 9 (3%) were women. Those 9 women were employed at seven different institutions (8% of our 86 responding institutions), with one institution having had 3 female interim presidents. The historical records of the institutions show that four of the women governed prior to 1980 and 5 of them after. Therefore, 6% of the 84 interim presidents since 1980 have been women. Four of the post-1980 female interim presidents were in the job of vice president for academic affairs when invited to be the interim president and the fifth was a dean of a college of home economics.

Greater than one-half, at least 5 out of the 9 women (56%) who could be traced through the questionnaires, went on to become presidents: 2 of those in interim presidencies before 1980 and 3 after. The 2 before 1980 moved directly into the presidency at their own institutions, and of the 3 coming on or since January 1, 1980, 1 became the president at the institution where she was picked as the interim president and 2 assumed presidencies elsewhere.

Interim Presidential Title

The title "interim president" was given to the person serving between permanent presidents since 1980 at 40 (51%) of the 79 institutions which included this data. "Acting president" was used at 38 (48%) of the schools. At 1 institution the person was called "'president' without an interim or acting designation" even though he was actually an interim president. From the questionnaires it is apparent that institutions have, not uncommonly, used both titles. Tradition or precedent appears be the best determinate of what the interim title will be at a university. "Interim president" was seen more frequently in recent appointments.

Interim Succession Policies

In all cases, the institution's governing board, the chief of the university system, or a combination of the two, was responsible for appointing the interim president. (Henceforth these parties shall be referred to as "appointing authorities.") Faculty and other university leaders were sometimes consulted. Institutions were, for the most part, unclear as to whether or not policies pertaining to interim presidential selection and the eligibility of interim presidents for presidential candidacy existed. Numerous exceptions to supposed policy were noted.

Interview Analysis

The study participants shared their experiences openly, spontaneously interjecting their interpretations and insights. For purposes of coherence, a chronological structure has been imposed on the data; the interim presidency is traced from the circumstances which precipitated the interim presidential appointments through the effects of the tenures on the participants' careers.

Interim Presidential Appointment

Utilization and Authorization

The vacancies which necessitated the utilization of the participants in this study resulted when the presidents of the universities 1. were promoted to system-level jobs, 2. resigned to accept presidencies at other institutions, 3. were to be away from the office for an extended (six months to one year) and known (a presidential "sabbatical") period, 4. assumed positions outside of academe, 5. were dismissed from their duties by their governing boards, 6. retired, or 7. were seriously ill and then died in office. Interim presidents were also employed when a

presidential successor had been named but was unable to arrive on campus before the former[14] president's departure.

The governance configuration of the institution, state, or board, determined who had the actual authority to contact and appoint the interim president. Outgoing presidents sometimes recommended individuals for interim presidencies to the appointing authorities, and then informed the prospective interim presidents of the recommendations.

Selection Hypotheses

The factors influencing interim selection, as hypothesized by the interim presidents, were concentrated in three primary clusters: experience, familiarity or comfortableness, and desired repose. The experience cluster was comprised of reasons relating to tenure at the institution, previous performance of presidential duties, administrative experience, and a history of working in conjunction with the president. Many of the interim presidents had served long years at their institutions: the median number of years an internal interim president had been at an institution when chosen as interim president was 18.5 with a mean of approximately 15 and a range of 2-33 years. Several had been "acting presidents" when their presidents were away for brief periods. In their prior administrative positions the interim presidents had worked very closely with their governing boards and presidents; they knew the innerworkings of their institutions. Overall, the interim presidents assumed their success in administrative positions and exposure to the presidency had sent a signal to appointing authorities that they would be wise and seasoned choices.

The second set of influencing factors revolved around the appointing authorities' familiarity or comfortableness with the interim presidents. While similar to and building on the experience cluster, these reasons for selection were more affective and personal and were a product of established relationships. The idea of familiarity or comfortableness as a reason for selecting a particular person gained validity when the interim president chosen was not the remaining top-ranking campus official. In these situations the interim presidents and appointing authorities "knew" each other. They had established comfortable working relationships. The appointing authorities chose someone who, to them, had demonstrated administrative prowess and with

whom they knew they could work.

According to the interim presidents, desired repose was the third motivation behind their selection. Their personal characteristics, experience, and professional images and positions played into the appointing authorities' wishes for quiescence. "Appearances" were very important to achieving this goal and the appointing authorities were cognizant of the implications of their selections. People who were near retirement and obviously not potential presidential candidates made for noncontroversial and safe choices.

Selecting the chief academic officer to be the interim president was another means of cultivating calm. The provost/vice president for academic affairs was generally recognized as the second in command and his/her selection was expected, consistent with the institutional hierarchy, and adhered to tradition. When a provost/vice president for academic affairs was passed over for the interim post the interim presidents attributed it to reasons of "familiarity," as discussed above, or to an individual's lack of time and/or experience in the position. If the provost was new to the institution or had not been the chief academic officer very long the appointing authority selected someone who knew the institution or the job better.

"Healing" was the motivation behind the appointment of some of the interim presidents. Controversy or disharmony had existed in the old regimes and the appointing authorities wanted to use the interregnum to mend relationships. In the same vein, another interim president credited his selection to his reputation for "being the person who dealt with problems" and his "established integrity in the office."

Likewise, the female interim presidents interpreted their appointments as symbolic gestures taken to encourage harmony and good will. By tapping a woman, the image projected to the public was that the institution was committed to equity and fairness and did not discriminate. Based on the awards and other feedback they received, the female interim presidents were popular with alumni and other groups and drew favorable attention to their universities.

External interim presidents thought they were chosen for the same combination of reasons as the internal interim presidents: they were experienced administrators with established reputations, they "knew" the appointing authority or were familiar with the institution, and, in

some cases, their selection brought objectivity to the search and the transition period.

Expectations

Appointing Authorities' Expectations

The interim presidents were seldom presented with directives for action from their appointing authorities. At many institutions the interim presidents were told nothing about the appointing authorities' goals for the interim period or specific things the appointing authorities hoped would be accomplished or attended to. No expectations were set forth. When those with appointing authority did talk with the interim presidents they spoke mainly about general roles and about issues facing the institutions. They would admonish the interim presidents to "take charge of the place and calm everything down" or to accomplish as much as possible. The appointing authorities did not establish concrete goals nor itemize tasks. This seemed satisfactory to the interim presidents; the lack of direction from their immediate supervisors—the governing board or system chief—did not bother them or deter them from taking the job.

Personal Expectations

The interim presidents had a difficult time separating their personal expectations for the position from the appointing authorities' expectations. They assumed they were much the same. These assumptions can be tied directly to the assumptions the interim presidents made about their selections, which were discussed previously. The interim presidents said the appointing authorities knew them well enough to know that the interim presidents knew, by virtue of their position, experience, and exposure, what to do.

Both the internal and external interim presidents were confident that they knew what lay ahead. They were well versed in the politics of their institutions, were aware of the issues and problems facing their campuses, and could approximate the length of their tenures. Their years of administrative experience, time on campus, and interaction with past presidents assured them that they understood the office and its expectations.

Accommodations

At a majority of the universities, but not at all, the interim presidents relinquished their former duties for the duration of the interim. At the others, they either retained partial

responsibility for their old offices or held joint appointments, retaining all the responsibilities of their regular positions. The interim presidents who appointed or nominated their successors did not portray the adjustments and shifting of personnel as major disruptions. Competent subordinates were selected to fill the temporarily vacated positions and were given the authority to run the offices. The interim presidents were consulted for decisions having long-term implications.

An interim president noted the symbolism of distancing the interim president from former responsibilities and alliances, and allowing that person to function and be seen solely as the interim president. This symbolism of separation or disassociation was a theme picked up by one of the interim presidents who had a joint appointment as the interim president and chief academic officer. She was never "regarded . . . as the president." She was always the academic vice president who was just filling in for the president until he got there. At times it seemed confusing to everyone as to where her vice-presidential authority stopped and her presidential authority started.

The joint appointments were made at those institutions where the length of the interim period was already established: either the new president had been selected and was scheduled to arrive on a certain date, or the president was away on a study leave and was to be back at the start of a semester. The length of these periods ranged from two to seven months. Why appointing authorities opted not to make separate appointments is unknown. Monetary savings was suggested as a motive. The interim presidents considered holding two administrative positions to be extremely demanding and exhausting, and a bad idea.

As with the selection, the appointment, and sometimes title, there was great symbolism attached to operating out of the presidential chambers. It added to the interim presidents' aura of authority and was a nonverbal testament to their power.

Nearly all the internal interim presidents received increases in their salaries and other presidential perquisites when they became interim presidents. The increases varied from slight, to the prorated equivalent of the president's salary for the period. The salary boosts were not an incentive to take the position but were seen by the interim presidents as an important

acknowledgement of their heightened responsibilities.

Interim Presidential Role

Decisions and Tasks

Budgetary and financial issues were a top priority and the interim presidents were responsible for such major financial actions as mid-year budget rescissions and developing biennium budgets. The interim presidents placed much weight on the time they spent working with the legislatures, alumni, and their local communities. They upheld the traditional presidential duties of presiding over ceremonial events and at each institution the interim president took actions or made decisions that were of special import to that school. The interim presidents often addressed long-smoldering problems that suddenly caught fire and, when determined appropriate, reversed decisions made by the past administration. "A very demanding and important subject" for a number of the interim presidents was keeping a watchful eye on the athletic department.

The interim presidents did what was necessary; they confronted the problems—with their long- and short-term implications—that were put before them. The interim presidents' expectations for the job, as enumerated earlier, proved realistic and the tasks the interim presidents subsequently performed held closely to those expectations. Surprises were few. Only one interim president considered the surprises significant enough to mention. Those surprises were not with the content of the post, but rather with its "scope."

Role

Metaphors and interpretation. The metaphors used by several of the interim presidents to illustrate their role and their expectations converged on the theme of institutional progress or moving the university forward. The interim presidents were "bridges" between presidencies and drivers whose task it was to "keep the car in the middle of the road," "keep speed up" and not "turn a sharp corner." The two metaphors represented movement along an established course and did not denote varying degrees of proactiveness and reactiveness or direction.

Moving the institution forward was taken by many of the interim presidents to be their primary charge and the essential constituent of the interim role. They wanted to avoid the

interim becoming a "holding time." To sustain the forward motion required that they confront whatever issues came before them.

Moving the institution ahead meant moving it forward but along the same path. As a senior officer of the university, the interim president was vested in the institution and ascribed to its established mission. The person did not wish, nor consider it appropriate or feasible, to deviate from the prescribed route.

Contrary to the perceptions of the other interim presidents, two of the study participants did look upon their tenures as "holding" matters. One of those interim presidents attributed her lowered expectations to her limited time in office and known successor. She generalized that in the more common interim scenario where the tenure length is unknown or is longer and the new president has not been selected, an interim president must be decisive and act with authority.

Another dimension of the role for some of the interim presidents, and one which preceded moving the institution forward, was reestablishing a state of normalcy or calm. The interim presidents sought to be "stabilizing influences" at institutions that had been experiencing turmoil and to foster environments in which faculty and staff could work undistracted. Their ability to do so was a reason behind their being selected.

A structural invariant of the interim presidency was the set of implicit constraints placed on the freedom of the interim presidents to act. Because the nature of the position is temporary and transitional the interim presidents did not feel it was within their purview to make long-range plans that would commit the institutions to courses that might prove untenable to the incoming administrations. Discordant with their position as "the president," this lack of freedom to elucidate their vision for the institution and make provisions for its realization compromised the interim presidents' authority. The interim presidents were emphatic about the inappropriateness of making decisions that would "shut down possibilities," or be "irreversible" for the next presidents.

The inability to set long-range goals and relatively short tenures in office, however, did not preclude the interim presidents' accomplishment of specific objectives. What could and needed

to be accomplished was dictated by the circumstances. The interim presidents found that a substantial amount of their time was pre-planned—speeches were scheduled months in advance and ceremonial events were perennial. Overall, the interim presidents felt like they had enough time to make a difference and be effective.

Leadership. Though the literature defines leadership is terms of vision and power, the interview participants saw the interim presidency—with its inherent limitations—as a leadership role. The unrest which accompanies presidential transition makes the need for leadership more acute. Constituents look to interim presidents for leadership and interim presidents can exhibit it not by shifting or establishing new priorities, but instead by adhering to and working to promote established and familiar goals.

Like the presidency, the interim presidency also involves management. The situation prompting the utilization of an interim president, the tranquility of the interim period, and the stage in the interim tenure affect whether the role will be dominated by leadership or management functions. At the universities where the interim presidents knew their tenures would be brief—the presidents had already been chosen—the interim presidents viewed themselves more as caretakers and managers. When the interim period went smoothly and no major problems arose the interim presidents devoted a larger proportion of their time to managerial duties. Crisis seemed to beget leadership. The interim presidents sensed that toward the end of their terms, when the new presidents were finally selected, their role shifted toward the managerial side.

Interim presidential cycle. This shifting is indicative of what can be conceived of as the interim presidential "cycle." The cycle is similar to the one followed by permanent presidents, but on a compressed scale, and corresponds with time, power, and authority in office. Interim presidents are "most a president" early in their terms. They have the most attention from their constituents and freedom in their decision making in their first few months in office. The majority of their major decisions are made during that time.

As the presidential search progresses and the candidates are narrowed down, the institution's focus begins to shift toward the prospective new president and the interim

president's power and authority are diminished. An interim president used the analogy of a "funnel going to a point" to describe this phenomenon. When a new president is named the locus of authority shifts to that person and "loyalties begin moving." As with a lame-duck president, faculty and staff begin looking and planning ahead. The interim president's role becomes increasingly managerial and decisions with long-term implications are made in consultation with the new president. This transfer of power is more pronounced the closer it gets to the new president's arrival and the degree to which this occurs depends on the individuals and the circumstances.

Presidential search. Interim presidential participation in the presidential search and selection ranged from "handling the day-to-day administration of the search" to no involvement. It was typical for the interim presidents to meet with or interview the final presidential candidates. Many of the participants felt that interim presidents can provide important institutional information to search committees and should be consulted. (Interim presidents who are candidates for the presidency should not play a part in the search process.)

Presidential transition. The interim presidents listed "preparing the way for the new president" as another component of the interim role. This included, as a tangent of the interim president's decision-making responsibility, that the interim president attempt to resolve any politically sensitive issues that might derail the new president's agenda or get the new president off to a rocky start. This aspect of the role was emphasized by the president emeritus—one who knew first-hand the value of this effort.

In addition to keeping the institution moving ahead and solving potential problems, interim presidents could best help to smooth the transition to a new administration by providing the future president with information that would orient the person to the institution. It was imperative that the president be apprised of sensitive political issues and personnel matters that could prevent early missteps in office. A well-ordered transition would also be promoted by the interim president consulting with the soon-to-be president on major issues. Interim presidents did not relinquish all their decision-making responsibility, but rather informed the new presidents of their decisions, and sought their advice on issues of vital importance. The interim

presidents noted that they were careful not to be overly helpful or to create an uncomfortable situation for the presidents.

Role interpretation variation. The interim presidents viewed their role both self-servingly and altruistically. It was as an opportunity to serve the institutions to which they had devoted their lives, as well as a chance to hone their administrative skills, prove their mettle as a president and increase their presidential stock. Their performance in their original jobs was enhanced through a better understanding of their institutions.

The perceptions of the interim presidents of their role varied very little when examined with regard to gender, internal/external selection, candidacy/noncandidacy for the presidency, and foreknowledge of length of term. The female interim presidents added that they desired to do well so as to reflect positively on the capabilities of female administrators. The external interim presidents did not conceive of any complications arising from their unfamiliarity with the institutions. The greatest variation in perception of the role came from those interim presidents who knew how long they would be in office because the new president had already been selected or the existing president would be returning. As discussed earlier, they interpreted their own interim roles as more managerial and constrained.

Constituent Relationships

Appointing Authorities

The interim presidents, with one exception, felt that their appointing authorities saw them as "the president." They accorded them the full authority, respect, and autonomy of the presidency. The appointing authorities were helpful and gave good counsel but did not interfere. The lone dissenting interim president believed he was treated with less deference because of his temporariness. The interim presidents received only positive feedback from the appointing authorities and it came primarily at the end of their tenures. They were not formally evaluated. The interim presidents assumed the appointing authorities were pleased with their performance.

Other University Constituents

The interim presidents found their university constituents to be very supportive,

particularly when the university had been embroiled in turmoil. (The female interim presidents felt that internal and external women's groups had been exceptionally supportive and encouraging.) Support, however, was seen as being conditional on the acceptability of the interim president to the faculty and the circumstances under which the individual was brought in. An interim president becoming a candidate for the presidency might detract from that person's support and cause his/her tenure to be viewed less objectively or innocuously.

An interim president, said the interview participants, sets the tone for the interim period. Constituents will follow the lead of the interim president. An interim president who wants to move the institution forward during his/her tenure must "strike that note." If an interim president appears hesitant to take action and treats the interim period as a holding time, the faculty will do likewise. Constituents are influenced by their earlier perceptions of people, and if the interim president was considered a caretaker before, then that image will carry over to his/her interim administration. Interim presidents, when returning to their former posts, did not find their institutional relationships strained.

External Constituents

The interim presidents were divided as to how external constituents, such as legislators, corporations, and people in the community, perceive an interim presidency. Some interim presidents detected no reluctance on the part of external constituents to deal with the university; they were supportive and it was business as usual. Others sensed a reticence among their external constituents and a desire to wait until someone with "long-term authority" was heading the institution.

Institutional Effects

Are institutions positively or negatively impacted by the period of transitional leadership? This group of former interim presidents was split as to the effect. The first set of interim presidents contended that interim presidencies have no or little significant effect on institutions. Because universities are large and complex bureaucracies they are self-sustaining and organizational performance is unaffected by the temporariness of the president. The second set postulated that, overall, institutions unintentionally slow down. Attention is directed

toward the transition in leadership and away from normal functioning. Neither set saw the time as inherently detrimental; its effect is largely situational.

The interim presidents observed that the months an interim president is in office could serve the positive purpose of allowing for a period of cooling off and calming down as well as providing for a time of institutional assessment. An interim president, as iterated before, can resolve politically delicate issues and keep the institution moving ahead. The negative aspects of an interim presidency are the apprehension it may create for senior administrators concerned about their own job stability and the general apprehension of the university community regarding the future direction of the institution. The twenty study participants were in concurrence that the length of the interim should be kept to a minimum. Indefinite periods or periods greater than a year result in frustration among the faculty and force interim presidents to take actions that are either excessive or insufficient.

Personal Effects and Recommendations

Post-interim Employment

The interim presidents who were not candidates for their institutions' presidencies, for the most part, returned to their former positions or retired. Thus far, one interim president who was not a candidate for president at her institution has gone on to a presidency at another institution. (One former interim president accepted another interim presidency.)

The interim presidency did lead directly to the presidency at their institutions for two of the participants. Those who had been candidates but were not selected did not remain long at their institutions. All either left voluntarily or were asked to leave. Eventually, though, all of these spurned presidential hopefuls went on to become presidents—one returning and serving as president at the institution he had left and two assuming presidencies elsewhere.

An interesting trend in relation to the enhanced status associated with being an interim president was detected. In several instances interim presidents, when returning to their previous jobs, were given embellished titles and/or additional responsibilities. The interim presidents believed this was done either as a recognition of their service to the university, or the realization that they—having been in charge of entire institutions—would not be challenged

by their previous roles. Either reason or both reasons may be true, and they raise the issue of what effect an interim presidency has on an individual's career. One man who accepted a new higher position was in the job only a year before the new president's administrative restructuring eliminated the position—thus giving credence to the doubts some interim presidents have regarding their futures at institutions. Possessing a prescience based on experience, one interim president signed a contract with the governing board guaranteeing his post-interim employment.

Selection Recommendations

The former interim presidents recommended that appointing authorities appoint respected internal senior administrators who are familiar with their institutions and governing boards as interim presidents. These persons would preferably, but not always, be the chief academic officers. Factors to be considered would be an individual's longevity at the institution and in his/her position, and perceived skills and image. The interim presidents agreed that no hard and fast rule could be applied and that the particular situation would influence who would be the best choice.

In most circumstances an internal interim president would be preferable to bringing in an outsider. The exceptions might be when the campus had been in turmoil, then an external interim president would be seen as being more objective and not being tied to the scandal or problems that had ousted the former president, or when there were no qualified internal administrators. The liabilities the interim presidents associated with going outside were the external interim president's lack of knowledge about the university and the time it would take to become acquainted with its nuances—the length of the interim president's institution-specific "learning curve"—and the disruption and impracticality of bringing in someone unfamiliar during a time when stability is sought.

The majority of the study participants advocated selecting someone with the qualities that would be expected and desired in a permanent president. The rolls of veteran presidents, interim presidents, and senior administrators were mentioned as good sources to turn to when seeking an interim president.

Succession Policies

Succession policies which automatically promote a person to the interim presidency when a presidential vacancy occurs received no support from the former interim presidents. Despite the urgings and admonitions in the literature, it was felt that succession policies were too limiting and inflexible. Governing boards or system chiefs should be free to select the best person for the job and the individual specified in the policy might not be that person. Complications could also arise should the person automatically promoted desire to be a candidate for the presidency.

Presidential Candidacy

Potential interim presidents were often asked by the appointing authority whether they intended or desired to be candidates for the presidency. A condition of the interim presidency at a portion of the institutions was that the interim president could not be a candidate. Depending on the institution and system, this condition had as its basis formal or informal policy or tradition. In some circumstances the decision to not allow the interim president to be a candidate was situation-specific. The decision was made prior to that particular search and was not policy- or tradition-based, but resulted from the circumstances surrounding the president's departure, past interim administrations, or the campus mood. Even at institutions or in systems where formal policy prohibited interim presidents from being presidential candidates, the policy was not strictly adhered to. The interim presidents readily cited examples of exceptions to the rules.

The interim presidents who did not desire or were not allowed to be candidates felt that it was important that their noncandidacies be announced or made public upon their selection. This eliminated speculation, allowed the campus to focus on the actual candidates and search, created the appearance of an objective search for external parties, and permitted the interim president to play a more participatory role in the search. For those interim presidents who had future presidential aspirations, it also signaled to outside observers why they were not chosen.

A common and related phenomenon was the development of groups of supporters—fan clubs— who encouraged the interim president to become a candidate for the presidency.

Governing board members as well as administrative staff and faculty members became cheerleaders for interim presidents. The interim presidents were flattered, but made uncomfortable, by this attention and were relieved to be able to fall back on their pre-selection commitment to not being a candidate to quell this potentially divisive support.

The interim presidents took a dialectical approach toward allowing interim presidents to be candidates for the presidency. They would present an argument against such a proposition, counter it with an argument for, and then conclude with a recommendation somewhere in the middle and combining elements of both arguments. Despite a long list of reasons to the contrary—including potential bias in interim presidential decisions and the negative publicity generated by what would appear to be a less-than- objective search —the arguments as to why an interim president should be allowed to be a candidate for the permanent presidency carried more weight. The bottom line for the institution, concluded the interim presidents, should be to get the best person for the interim presidency and the best person for the permanent presidency. And, at times, this person is one in the same. An institution should not be compromised by being forced to settle for second best or a less competent leader in the short- or long-run because of a policy or the possible negative impacts of an interim president's candidacy. The appointing authority should have the flexibility and authority to choose whom it deems best, given the situation.

An unsuccessful run at the presidency by the interim president was seen by the interview participants as being detrimental to ones future presidential prospects. The interim president's failure to obtain the post at his/her home institution raised the question of: Why was the person passed over? The data, as aforementioned, do not necessarily support this pessimistic view. The figures obtained in this study point to a large number of interim presidents going on to presidencies. However, it is not known how many former interim presidents have applied for presidencies and been rejected.

Training and Implications for the Presidency

Training

The interim presidency, according to this group of former interim presidents, was an

invaluable experience that broadened their knowledge and perspectives of the presidency and the university. Among the many things they considered important were learning how to work with a large number of diverse constituencies, such as alumni, parents, and the external community, and gaining a greater understanding of how the university functioned as a whole. They saw the "big picture" for the first time. Their appreciation for the time demands on the president and the president's schedule also increased. They learned what questions to ask about institutions and how to prioritize demands. The interim presidency presented an opportunity for the interim presidents to critique themselves personally and professionally and to see how they might perform in the role.

Career Aspirations and General Sentiments

The effects of the interim presidency on the career aspirations of men and women holding the position were varied and resulted in part from the predilections of the individuals or their circumstances. Being an interim president reinforced the desire of those who had wished to be a president. Others knew before accepting the interim presidency that they did not wish to be presidents. Their interim experience, while enjoyable and rewarding, did not change their minds. Succeeding in the interim presidency boosted the confidence of the individuals and proved to them that they had the ability to be presidents.

Overall, the interim presidents found the interim presidency to be both personally and professionally rewarding. In every case, it was a pleasurable and satisfying experience and one which the participants felt fortunate to have had.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of this research, what has been learned about presidential transition and the status of the interim presidency? Demographically, it can be said that interim presidencies have been pervasive throughout this century. The statistics indicate that interim employment is on the rise. Summarizing the data from the questionnaires we see that at public research/doctorate-granting universities:

1) Mean presidential tenure is about 7 years, 5 months with 73% of presidents serving 10 or fewer years.

2) Approximately 11% of presidencies turn over each year.

3) 93% of institutions have had at least one interim president on or since January 1, 1900.

4) Since 1980 interim presidents have been utilized at an increasing rate.

5) Mean interim presidential tenure is approximately 8.5 months, but 20% of interim presidents are in office for over a year.

6) Institutions operate under an interim presidential administration nearly 8% of the time.

7) Around 87% of interim presidents are males who are chosen from within their own institutions by either the governing board or the system chief.

8) Written succession policies do not play a significant role in interim presidential selection.

9) The chief academic affairs position is the source of 56% of internal interim presidents; 23% of internal interim presidents come from other vice presidential- and senior-level positions.

10) The titles "interim president " and "acting president" are applied with nearly equal frequency. However, the trend in the recent past has been toward "interim president."

11) At least 31% of interim presidents employed since 1980 have gone on to presidencies with 18% moving directly into the presidency from the interim presidency at the same institution.

These figures imply that presidential transition and periods of interim governance are a continuing reality in higher education. Thus, they should be conceived of and studied as normal stages in the governance cycle. Institutions can anticipate a change in the presidency and the need for an interim president at least once a decade and expect the person who is selected to preside for an academic year.

In the main, institutions have chosen their interim presidents from the pool of senior administrators on their own campuses. Because women have historically not been a substantial part of that pool, there have been few female interim presidents. A steady stream of interim presidents has flowed into the presidency at research institutions. These individuals bring to the interim presidency and carry on to the presidency their experience and knowledge of the culture at like-type institutions. Corresponding to the pattern of administrative movement

typical in higher education, interim presidents spend most of their administrative lives within restricted institutional categories.

Constituting the essence of the interim presidency are the personal experiences and perceptions of the people who have served as interim presidents, including the subjective evaluations and reactions to the nature of that experience and its consequences on the individual careers. Conclusions about this essence, as grounded in the interview data, are the following:

1) The interim presidency is a personally and professionally rewarding experience. Interim presidents receive special satisfaction from aiding their institutions.
2) The effects of interim presidencies on individuals and their careers can be wide ranging, and for this group, were predominantly positive. Being an interim president often gives a person an enhanced status on his/her campus. Many interim presidents, as also evidenced by the demographic data, are able to use their interim experiences as stepping stones to permanent presidencies.
3) The interim presidency provides a valuable opportunity for assessing skills and career goals, and, depending on the circumstances, good training for the presidency. Interim presidents gain an appreciation for how institutions work as a whole and feel that because of the experience they are better able to serve their institutions.
4) Internal and external university constituents, particularly appointing authorities, are supportive of interim administrations. The greatest support for interim presidents is shown at institutions that have experienced turmoil and at institutions where constituents sense objectivity or authority in the interim appointment.
5) Interim presidents consider themselves as presidents "ad interim" and are granted the commensurate power and authority by appointing authorities.
6) Interim presidents, through their actions and leadership, shape constituents' impressions of the interim period and thereby set the stage for what can be accomplished.

The phenomenology of the interim presidency is complex and multidimensional. A number of other conclusions which warrant discussion emanate from the institutional situations

represented by the participants in this research.

There is no single institutional condition, other than a presidential vacancy, which dictates when an interim president will be employed. Interim presidents are engaged during periods of both calm and chaos and they succeed both popular and controversial presidents. Depending on the circumstances under which they are called in and the qualifications of the individuals, three types of interim presidents can be identified. Drawing an analogy to baseball, interim presidents can be seen as 1) back-up players, 2) utility players, or 3) pinch hitters.

The first type of interim presidents, the back-up players, are the most prevalent type of interim presidents. They are senior administrators, usually well-known to the appointing authorities, who enter interim presidencies under various conditions and serve for unspecified periods. The back-up players have a good feel for the presidency and for their institutions. Often they are persons who have been regarded as the "second in command" so that the move to being the chief executive is not one that presents strange or unexpected challenges.

Utility player interim presidents are those who possess many of the same skills as the back-up players. They, however, have established reputations for themselves as "interim presidents" or former presidents, and have demonstrated their administrative and leadership capabilities. These people are flexible and talented enough to fit into the interim presidency at many institutions and typically serve in the interim capacity at more than one university. An example of the utility player interim president is the person who has already been an interim president within a system and who is asked again to be an interim president within that same system.

The final type of interim presidents, the pinch hitters, are summoned in pinches. They are brought in for limited and set periods. The pinch hitters act as interim presidents when new presidents have already been selected but are unable to arrive before outgoing presidents leave and when presidents are away from campuses for extended periods of known length (e.g., sabbaticals and temporary governmental appointments). They are obviously not presidential contenders and sometimes retain responsibility for their administrative posts as well as for the interim presidency. The distinguishing characteristic of this type is that the permanent president is known at the time the interim president assumes responsibility. Most often the

pinch hitter would come from the executive ranks within the institution.

The interim experience is relatively consistent across the interim presidential types, with the exception of the pinch hitters regarding their interpretations of their leadership and freedom to act. The distinction between the types is more constructive for conceiving of when interim presidents might be employed and who they might be than it is as a prescription for the interim presidents' terms. It is important to realize that the boundaries of these types are pliant and can be stretched to accommodate many different experiences and circumstances. Too, evolution can occur, and some back-up players and pinch hitters may develop into utility players.

Appointing authorities do not explicitly state to interim presidents or constituents why certain individuals are chosen or their expectations of the interim presidents. This lack of communication and direction results in speculation and suspicion within the university community and leaves interim presidents to establish their own goals and courses of action. The interim presidents in this study attributed their selection to 1) experience—relating to tenure at the institution, previous performance of presidential duties, administrative experience, and a history of working in conjunction with the president; 2) familiarity or comfortableness of the appointing authority with the individual—a product of established relationships and "known" compatibility; and 3) desired repose— the choice of noncontroversial individuals whose personal characteristics, experience, and professional images encouraged healing, harmony, and good will. Melding these presumed reasons for their selections with personal expectations, the interim presidents fashioned a role for themselves that they believed matched the needs of their institutions.

The recognition of the interim presidents and the appointing authorities that the interim presidents "knew" what to do and would be able to handle the vicissitudes of the job is representative of what Schon (1983) has labeled "reflection-in-action" (p. 49). He describes "reflection-in-action" as tacit knowledge that is "implicit in our patterns of action and in our feel for the stuff with which we are dealing." This knowledge is an outgrowth of experience in the job or organization.

According to Fisher(1991), appointing authorities are the parties responsible for ensuring that presidents, or in this case interim presidents, are seen as legitimate leaders and as possessing power. Through their support and actions they confer legitimacy on the interim president. When appointing authorities fail to take the symbolic actions of relieving interim presidents of prior responsibilities which might confuse their authority and status, allowing them to operate out of the president's office, and granting them the customary presidential perquisites, they send the negative message that the interim president is not truly "the president."

Tierney, writing from the perspective of how organizations and leaders convey meaning through the use of symbols, explains that "symbols emerge as an organizational strategy, design or emblem that seek to encompass or interpret situations for organizational participants. . . . Symbolism is intertwined with participants [sic] expectations and understanding of leadership" (pp. 8-10). The trappings of the presidency therefore help constituents interpret the significance of the interim period and the stature of the interim president. Interim presidents are identified as leaders by the symbols that are associated with them and, in turn, use symbols to solidify their leadership standing.

The actual tasks performed by the interim presidents were the same as those carried out by permanent presidents. There was no diminution of duties and interim presidents took responsibility for developing budgets, representing their universities at ceremonial functions, and confronting whatever issues and problems faced the institutions during their tenures. The majority of the interim presidents did not adopt a holding stance toward the interregnum and this proactive attitude reflected their perceptions of their role.

Interim presidents metaphorically described the interim presidential role as that of a "bridge." They were bridges from one presidency to the next, implying that progress was unhalting. The interim presidents spoke in the language of "movement along an established course" and believed that they were charged to push their institutions forward in the direction of the existing mission of each institution. In keeping with this charge, the interim presidents readied their universities for their new presidents by often addressing politically sensitive issues

that might derail the new administrations and by consulting with the future presidents on major decisions.

Notwithstanding their belief that they had the freedom and authority to act, the interim presidents acknowledged that the role is inherently constrained by its time limitations and by what long-range planning decisions can appropriately be made by a temporary administrator. These constraints were felt most acutely by the pinch hitters, who operated under the shadow of a known president. The interim presidents' interpretations of the role, otherwise, varied little in relation to gender, internal/external selection, candidacy/noncandidacy for the presidency, and foreknowledge of length of term.

The potential unrest of the transitional period and the demands and nature of the interim presidency require that interim presidents be leaders. Interim presidents exert leadership through their steady guidance and command. They, like most leaders, are concomitantly managers. The situation prompting the utilization of an interim president, the tranquility of the interim period, and the stage in the interim tenure determine the congruous mix and form of management and leadership. The authority, power, and leadership cycle of the interim presidency is similar to that experienced by permanent presidents. Interim presidents are most a leader early in their terms with their power and authority weakening as time passes and attention becomes focused on the incoming president.

The situational leadership approach seems to be the applicable model for interim leadership. That model emphasizes that leaders must diagnose their situations and then adapt their leadership style to those circumstances (Fiedler & Chemers, 1974; Gorton, 1979; Hersey & Blanchard, 1988). No one leadership style will always be correct. Situational factors, in addition to those listed above, impacting and impinging on the interim presidents' leadership and effectiveness are the acceptance of the interim president as the leader by constituents and constituents' expectations for the interim period. If one ascribes to the notion that distance from followers makes for more effective leadership, then having risen through the ranks and being well-known could be a negative situational factor for insider interim presidents (Fisher, 1991).

The leadership exhibited by the interim presidents is consonant with that witnessed in presidents interviewed for the Institutional Leadership Project—a widely recognized longitudinal study of collegiate leadership. Birnbaum's (1992) research for that project and previous scholarship have led him to declare that

> transformational leadership. . . is an anomaly in higher education. Because the goals and enduring purposes of an academic institution are likely to be shared by its history, its culture, and the socialization and training of its participants, rather than by an omnipotent leader, attempts at transformational leadership are more likely to lead to disruption and conflict than to desirable outcomes (p. 29).

Good presidents, he says, cannot be "characterized as either purely transactional or transformational but were seen to synthesize the two approaches." Fundamentally, the interim condition defines that interim presidents be transactional leaders and work within the confines of their systems to aid constituents in meeting their goals.

Periods of transitional leadership do not appear to have an inherently negative effect on universities. Institutional functioning, because of the bureaucratic underpinnings of research institutions, continues at a normal, though slightly retarded, pace when an interim president is at the helm. The interim presidents contended that institutions can benefit from the interregnum if they use the time for institutional reassessment and for readying the institution for new management. Interim periods of extended duration should be avoided so as to minimize institutional apprehension and maintain institutional momentum.

Bureaucracy and succession have long been known to sustain one another and that this relationship is observable in the interim phenomenon in higher education is not surprising. Gouldner (1954) has noted that in bureaucratic institutions where turnover is common, succession is made easier because "workers' loyalties are attached to the office, and the roles of which it is composed, rather than to the person who occupies the position" (p. 97). When new leaders—interim presidents— conform and perform as expected, institutional functioning is not interrupted. Bureaucracy in this situation is a "problem-solving type of social action" and prevents the presidential transition from having an unduly disruptive effect.

Interim presidents recommended that appointing authorities use skills, image, position, and longevity as the criteria for selecting interim presidents. The appropriate combination would be determined by the particular interim situation and the needs of the institution. Chief academic officers, other senior administrators, and former administrators are the top prospects for the interim job. Succession policies, because of their restrictiveness, were not advocated by the interim presidents.

And finally, the issue of whether or not the interim president will be permitted to be a candidate for the permanent presidency was of priority in interim presidents' minds. They admonished appointing authorities and prospective interim presidents to keep the best interests of the institution in mind while judiciously evaluating the options. While some institutions have adopted policies which preclude interim administrators from being candidates, such policies are clearly the exception.

Summary

By carefully selecting an interim president to govern during the interregnum, and dealing with interim issues that will impact the university in the future, an institution presents a positive image to the higher education community, encourages uninterrupted institutional functioning, and sets the stage for a smooth presidential transition. The governing board can concentrate on the search instead of worrying about the institution.

Interim presidents can be valuable assets to their institutions. It is hoped that this increased understanding of the actualities of the interim presidency and the interim period will lead to greater effectiveness in the position.

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Footnote

[1]Selection of the interview participants was based in the following ways on availability, gender, location, and position. Availability—If an institution did not know the whereabouts of the former interim president that person was not sought. In addition, several of the former interim presidents were known to be deceased or otherwise unavailable. Gender—Only five females were reported to have been interim presidents since 1980. Believing that their experiences would offer a unique and vital perspective on the interim presidency, all five were chosen to participate in the interviews. However, only four were able to comply with the request. Location—An effort was made to include only one former interim president from an institution and to select persons from varying geographic locales. Position—Consideration was given as to whether the individual was promoted from within/outside the institution, had served one or more times as an interim president, was known to have gone on to a permanent presidency, was known to have served for a limited period of time (the questionnaire indicated that the interim president served while the president was away from the office for a specified period), had concluded his/her career (the interim president was known to be retired); and the position he/she was in when promoted to the interim presidency. Ultimately, selection of the final interview participants was contingent on availability and was dependent on the best judgment of this researcher.